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Mercer County Prosecutor's Internet Crimes Against Children Unit Arrests West Deptford Township Man

Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri reported today that an investigation into online child exploitation has resulted in the arrest of a West Deptford Township man.

Todd Merinuk, 27, West Deptford, NJ, is charged with two counts of second-degree attempted sexual assault, three counts of third-degree attempted endangering the welfare of a child and one count of second-degree attempted luring. The prosecutor's office has filed a motion to detain Merinuk pending trial.

Approximately three weeks ago, detectives with the prosecutor's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Unit investigating individuals trying to exploit children online connected with a subject via an anonymous social media platform. The individual, later identified as Merinuk, began chatting with a detective who was working in an undercover capacity, posing as a 14-year-old female. The chat included multiple sexually explicit messages, a photo sent by Merinuk of an adult male penis, and statements by Merinuk that he wanted to meet in person to engage in various sexual acts.

On March 16, 2023, Merinuk sent a ride share vehicle to an address in Mercer County to pick up the "14-year-old female" with whom he believed he was conversing in order to transport her to his location in Gloucester County. Believing the victim had arrived to his

location via ride share, Merinuk appeared and was taken into custody without incident by members of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, the Gloucester County Prosecutor's Office and U.S. Homeland Security Investigations.

Second-degree crimes carry a sentence of five to 10 years in state prison and a fine of up to \$150,000. Third-degree crimes carry a sentence of three to five years in state prison and a fine of up to \$15,000.

Prosecutor Onofri urged anyone with information about suspected improper contact by unknown persons communicating with children via the internet or possible exploitation or sexual abuse of children to please contact his Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Unit at (609) 989-6568 or the New Jersey Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force tip line at (888) 648-6007.

Despite having been charged, every defendant is presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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Todd Merinuk